



United States Department of the Interior BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Bakersfield Field Office
3801 Pegasus Drive
Bakersfield, CA 93308
www.blm.gov/california



December 1, 2017

Dear Reader:

Please find attached the Public Scoping Materials for the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Case Mountain Vegetation and Forest Health Plan. This project specifically aims to implement a vegetation management and forest health strategy to prevent catastrophic wildfires on approximately 444 acres of BLM-administered public lands at Case Mountain. A public scoping meeting will be held at St. Anthony Retreat, 43816 Sierra Drive, Three Rivers, California 93271, from 5:30pm to 8:00pm on December 14, 2017.

The Case Mountain area is part of the 20,000-acre Kaweah Area of Critical Environmental Concern, which was designated for the protection of the six distinct giant sequoia groves, other sensitive plants and animals, riverbank ecosystems and culturally significant areas. The area is also part of the Case Mountain Extensive Recreation Management Area, which offers miles of mountain biking, hiking and horseback riding trails; picnic tables; and opportunities for wildlife viewing and photography in the foothills of the Sierras. In addition, the Milk Ranch Wilderness Study Area occurs within Case Mountain.

The attached Public Scoping Materials, including discussion of the preliminary issues, route alternatives, and maps, are provided to inform the public and allow for public comments on the project prior to the initiation of an environmental analysis. Your review and comments are requested to ensure the BLM has accurately captured the issues and management concerns as they currently exist and to ensure the most feasible and viable alternatives have been considered.

Beyond this public scoping period, an additional opportunity for public comments on the preferred (proposed) alternative and draft environmental analysis will be accommodated prior to a final decision by BLM management.

Public scoping comments will be accepted through January 2, 2018. The BLM can best utilize your comment submissions if they are received within the review period and if they address specific details of the attached documents.

It should be noted that any personal information you provide, including name and contact information, will become part of the official record for this project and may be distributed should that specific information be requested.

Comments may be submitted electronically to: blm_ca_case_mtn@blm.gov; ePlanning website at: <https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/planAndProjectSite.do?methodName=renderDefaultPlanOrProjectSite&projectId=94161&detmId=0b0003c88102604b>; hand delivery; or by mail to:

Attn: Case Mountain Vegetation and Forest Health Plan
Bakersfield Field Office
3801 Pegasus Drive
Bakersfield, California 93308-6837

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gabriel Garcia', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Gabriel Garcia
Field Manager, Bakersfield Field Office

A. ANTICIPATED PLANNING ISSUES AND MANAGEMENT CONCERNS

A planning issue is identified as a matter of controversy or dispute over resource management activities or land use that is well defined or topically discrete and entails alternatives between which to choose. Management concerns are topics or points of dispute that involve a resource management activity or land use. While some concerns overlap issues, a management concern is generally more important to an individual or a few individuals, as opposed to a planning issue, which has more widespread point of conflict. However, certain resource values (e.g., cultural resources) will still play pivotal roles in developing alternatives and reaching decisions regarding the major issues. Although a resource value cannot itself be an issue, the issues included below are organized under general resource values for purposes of organizational structure.

The issues and management concerns presented below are preliminary and based on the best information known to date. Preparation of the Programmatic Environmental Assessment will afford opportunities for collaboration with local, State, Federal and Tribal governments and land management agencies, public interest groups, and public land users. As a result, these issues and concerns may need to be modified to reflect public comments and concerns raised during the public scoping period.

Issue No. 1: Air & Atmospheric Values

- How would the Proposed Action and Alternatives contribute to emissions of criteria pollutants and greenhouse gases in the San Joaquin Valley?
- How would BLM mitigate for potential impacts to air quality and greenhouse gas emissions from the Proposed Action and Alternatives?

Issue No. 2: Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

- What impacts would the Proposed Action and Alternatives have on the Kaweah Area of Critical Environmental Concern?

Issue No. 3: Biological Resources

- How would the Proposed Action and Alternatives affect habitat of special status species including giant sequoia, Sequoia gooseberry, Shirley Meadows star-tulip, Pacific fisher, California condor, and Spotted owl?

Issue No. 4: Cultural Resources

- How would the Proposed Action and Alternatives impact historic and prehistoric cultural sites within Case Mountain?

Issue No. 5: Fire

- How would the Proposed Action and Alternatives affect fire behavior within Case Mountain, surrounding landscape, and Wildland Urban Interface (WUI)?

Issue No. 6: Paleontological Resources

- How would the Proposed Action and Alternatives impact paleontological specimens within Case Mountain?

Issue No. 7: Rangeland Management

- What affect would the Proposed Action and Alternatives have on grazing within Case Mountain?

Issue No. 8: Recreation & Visitor Services

- What affect would various treatment of vegetation and tree stands have on the recreational experience of visitors in the Milk Ranch/Case Mountain Wilderness Study Area (WSA)?
- How would the Proposed Action and Alternatives affect traffic and tourism in the town of Three Rivers?

Issue No. 9: Visual Resource Management

- How would the character of the viewshed from key observation points in the Milk Ranch/Case Mountain WSA be modified by the Proposed Action and Alternatives?

Issue No. 10: Water Quantity & Quality

- How would the Proposed Action and Alternatives affect the quantity and quality of surface water within and downstream of Case Mountain?

Issue No. 11: Wilderness Study Areas

- How would the Proposed Action and Alternatives affect characteristics of the Milk Ranch/Case Mountain Wilderness Study Area?

B. ROUTE ALTERNATIVES

BLM proposes to implement this project under two route alternatives:

- Alternative A: Highway 198 to Craig Ranch Road
- Alternative B: Highway 198 to South Fork Road to Cinnamon Canyon Road
- Alternative considered but eliminated from detailed analysis: Mineral King Road

C. MAPS

Included as separate attachments.